

# Blue Mass honors Central Arkansas first responders

written by Dwain Hebda |



Our Lady of Good Counsel Church in Little Rock welcomed police officers, firefighters and emergency first responders to its second annual Blue Mass Sept. 17. Bishop Anthony B. Taylor presided, assisted by Deacon John Hall of Little Rock.

"I have a nephew who is a Texas state trooper and through him I have gotten a glimpse into the courage, discipline and patient professionalism required of you, as well as some of the risks you face daily in the exercise of your duties," Bishop Taylor said in his homily.

"So today we thank you for your service and dedication, we pray for your safety and we ask God to shower special graces upon you, so that you will be able — in St. Paul's words — to 'bear all things, believe all things, hope all things and endure all things' because, after all 'love never fails.'"

The congregation on hand for the event included a Knights of Columbus honor guard from various councils in Little Rock and several seminarians from the diocesan House of Formation located at Good Counsel. Little Rock chief of police Kenton Buckner was an honored guest at the Mass.

"I think it's important that our first responders recognize that we may not support them physically by being there, but we always support them spiritually with our prayers," said Hall of Our Lady of the Holy Souls Church in Little Rock, who is also a chaplain with the Little Rock Police Department. "Not only with prayers for our first responders, but prayers for those they are responding to.

"I know in my personal prayer I always include our firefighters and police officers, our medical personnel that are responding to help people, to keep them safe and to allow God to work

through them and let them be instruments of peace and help and whatever that person may need.”

Personal letters of invitation were sent to police, fire and rescue entities throughout Pulaski County. Church secretary Carol Miller, who helped organize the event, said to her knowledge, this is the only Blue Mass held in the Diocese of Little Rock, and if it was only held in one parish, Good Counsel was a fitting site.

“We pray specifically for first responders at every Mass,” she said. “They are always one of the prayers of the faithful.”

The Blue Mass is a regular fixture on parish calendars in other parts of the country sometimes held in conjunction with National Police Week in May. The event gathered steam following 9/11, but in some parishes is a longstanding tradition.

St. Patrick Church in Washington, D.C., has honored police and emergency first responders in this manner for 20 years. The 2014 event there included hundreds of law enforcement and public safety officials in procession to the church, pipe and drum corps, bagpipers and the playing of “Taps” during Mass to honor the fallen of the past year.

Even though the Arkansas Mass is only in its second year, it’s already garnering positive comments from the men and women it is meant to honor.

“It means a lot to know that the community actually really cares,” said LRPD Sgt. John Comeau, a parishioner with Cathedral of St. Andrew. “It’s pretty tough on the streets. Especially for Catholics, to offer a Mass, it’s just very important.”

Bobbie Townsend of Jacksonville, a captain with the Pulaski County Sheriff’s Office, decided to attend after hearing about the event at work. She was also moved by the event, even though she was not Catholic.

“Sometimes you feel unappreciated and especially when there’s some bad press. It’s like nobody cares,” she said. “This here, you know they care, you know they love you, you feel it. It’s very important.”

Townsend said she has on occasion attended Mass before and finds the celebration beautiful even when it isn’t specifically offered for her.

“I’ve attended a couple of others. I love them, I just really do,” she said. “Even though I’m not Catholic, I love the spirit and I love the prayers. The prayers all go to the same God.”